

AGP 30 – Scenic Resources

This policy in the Agriculture Element states that the scenic corridors and the standards to protect their scenic vistas shall not interfere with agricultural uses on private lands. The policy further states that in designated scenic corridors, land divisions, and new development requiring a discretionary permit shall

-Balance the protection of the scenic resources with the protection of agricultural resources and facilities

-Favor development locations that minimize visibility from the scenic corridor and are compatible with agricultural operations

-In prominent locations, encourage structures that blend with the natural landscape or are traditional for agriculture.

Appendix 9 provides an overview of the county's scenic resources.

Relationship to Other Elements, Plans, and Programs

The policies and strategies in this chapter are consistent with other Elements of the General Plan. For example, Policies VR 1.1, 2.1 and 4.1 relate directly to Agriculture Element Policy 30. The visual resources policies also relate to other chapters in this Element, such as Open Space and Biological Resources.

The goals, policies, and implementation strategies in this chapter are applied in concert with additional goals, policies, regulations, or standards in specific planning areas as specified in the Land Use Ordinance and the Local Coastal Program. For example, some important landscapes have been identified and addressed in scenic Sensitive Resource Areas (SRA – combining designations or zoning overlays used to protect certain scenic areas) and in Highway Corridor Design Standards (HCDS). Figure VR-1 provides a map of designated areas where scenic protection policies apply.

Coastal visual resources are addressed by the County's Local Coastal Program, specifically, the Coastal Plan Policies, the area plans, and Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance. Policies in this Element supplement the Coastal Plan Policies, except that when the policies of this Element conflict with the Coastal Plan Policies, the Coastal Plan Policies control.

Major Issues

Scenic Landscapes. Development will inevitably occur within some of the county's scenic areas. The location and design of development in these areas can have a profound effect on urban and rural landscapes. Buildings that are appropriately placed and designed buildings can complement and even blend with the natural landscape. However, inappropriately located and designed development including telecommunication facilities, roads, and billboards can detract from and conflict with an area's overall



character. Land management practices may also cause unnecessary harm to visual resources.

Community Separation. A characteristic that distinguishes San Luis Obispo County from metropolitan areas is the continued existence of rural-appearing land, called Community Separators, between separate, identifiable communities and towns. Open spaces and the rural character between communities are being lost to urban and suburban uses. As Community Separators are typically rural, many of these areas are also scenic. The 2006 San Luis Obispo County Community Separator Study recommends ways to maintain community separation in key areas. Figure VR-2, a map of Conceptual Community Separators, identifies the general locations where special policies should apply.

Scenic Corridors. Scenic corridors are view areas, or "viewsheds" from popular or well-traveled public roads and highways that have unique or outstanding scenic qualities. Inappropriate development or billboards can intrude upon these viewsheds. Some examples are highly visible graded roads and pads, buildings that are too close to a highway, and building designs that silhouette against the skyline, telecommunications facilities, utilities, signage, and other structures that dominate rather than blend with a natural landscape. Scenic highways and roads are scenic corridors that are designated to conserve and enhance their scenic beauty. Highway One is a designated State Scenic Highway and National Scenic Byway from San Luis Obispo to the Monterey County line. A portion of Lake Nacimiento Drive is also a designated State Scenic Highway. The County or the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) through a process that considers local needs and regulations may designate additional scenic roads and highways through a process that considers local needs and regulations.

The County has adopted Highway Corridor Design Standards along Highway 101 that address residential and related development. An official scenic highway designation could result in more attention to sensitive design and promote tourism. Designating additional scenic roads and highways should not place undue restrictions on private property, or cause impacts to

Scenic Landmarks and Views. Visual resources are often spectacular, steep mountain ranges, the Pacific Ocean shoreline or volcanic peaks. Some outstanding features, such as peaks and coastal views, are so beautiful and dramatic that they have an iconic status as landmarks. These icons of the landscape may be miles long but only visible to the traveling public for a few seconds. Or, like Morro Rock, they may be visible to entire communities. They are especially sensitive to impairment by development. Cooperation and partnerships are essential between land owners, County government and land conservation organizations to conserve and enhance views of these resources.



Goals, Policies, and Implementation Strategies

The intent of the following goals, policies, and implementation strategies is to protect the visual character and identity of the county while protecting private property rights, in order to: 1) maintain a sense of place recognized by residents, 2) preserve intact scenic landscapes that are highly valued by residents and visitors, and 3) maintain a high-quality visual environment that enhances tourism, real estate values and economic growth.

TABLE VR-1
GOALS FOR VISUAL RESOURCES

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|------------------|---|
| Goal VR 1 | The natural and agricultural landscape will continue to be the dominant view in rural parts of the county. |
| Goal VR 2 | The natural and historic character and identity of rural areas will be preserved. |
| Goal VR 3 | The visual identities of communities will be preserved by maintaining rural separation between them. |
| Goal VR 4 | Visual resources will be protected within visual resource sensitive areas (SRAs) and for scenic corridors along well-traveled highways and roads. |
| Goal VR 5 | Views from scenic vistas and vista points will be protected. |
| Goal VR 6 | A cohesive visual character will be maintained in urban areas. |
| Goal VR 7 | Views of the night sky and its constellations of stars will be maintained. |
| Goal VR 8 | Visual intrusions of signs will be minimized within public view corridors |
| Goal VR 9 | The visual effects of utility lines will be minimized. |



GOAL

1

**THE NATURAL AND AGRICULTURAL
LANDSCAPE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE
DOMINANT VIEW IN RURAL PARTS OF
THE COUNTY.**

**We will recognize
success when...**

- Land use strategies and standards are in place to maintain clear separations between communities and rural areas, with distinct edges around urban and village areas.
- Standards are in place throughout the county to assure that development protects important scenic landscapes and landmarks, and scenic viewsheds along well-traveled highways and roads, without undue restrictions on private property or agricultural operations.
- The visibility and clarity of the night sky in communities and rural areas is maintained, even as additional development occurs.

Policy VR 1.1 Adopt Scenic Protection Standards

Protect important scenic landmarks, views, and landscapes, especially including visual Sensitive Resource Areas (SRAs) from incompatible development and land uses

↓ **Implementation Strategy VR 1.1.1 Identify and Designate Scenic Landmarks and Landscapes**

After extensive public participation, identify and designate scenic landscapes and important scenic landmarks that define the image of the county in order to conserve highly sensitive areas. This effort will refine and supplement the existing designated scenic areas, such as Sensitive Resource Area combining designations for visual resources, using recognized methods.

↓ **Implementation Strategy VR 1.1.2 Amend Plans and Ordinances**

Amend the Land Use Ordinance, Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance, and/or Area Plans, as applicable to enact or revise ordinance standards to protect scenic resources. Adoption and implementation of scenic protection standards shall not interfere with agricultural uses on private lands consistent with AGP30. Standards for land use permits, including industrial and processing uses, and subdivisions should include visual assessments by qualified experts; visually effective setbacks near highways and roadways; siting in unobtrusive locations; and standards for height, architectural design, landscaping, lighting, and signs. The standards should emphasize avoiding visual impacts through alternative locations and designs where feasible. Establish consistent Countywide Viewshed Protection Standards.



GOAL

3

THE VISUAL IDENTITIES OF COMMUNITIES WILL BE PRESERVED BY MAINTAINING RURAL SEPARATION BETWEEN THEM.

Policy VR 3.1 Identify and Protect Community Separators

Identify Community Separators and propose land use strategies and development standards to maintain separate, identifiable cities and communities with intervening rural land. Involve landowners and communities in this process. Identification and designation of Community Separators shall not interfere with agricultural uses on private lands consistent with AGP 30.

↓ ***Implementation Strategy VR 3.1.1 Community Separator: Amend the Land Use Element and Ordinance***

Amend the Land Use Element and Ordinance to identify and include Community Separators as Land Use Element Combining Designations with accompanying Land Use Ordinance development standards. Amendments will:

- a. Identify three distinct features (scenic vistas, transition areas and urban arrival areas) within each Community Separator. Mapping of Community Separators will remain conceptual until the Countywide Rural Plan Land Use and Circulation Element is completed, and will not be parcel-specific.
- b. Establish standards for Community Separators that will retain rural land use designations and density, preserve natural features, and protect the long-term viability of agriculture.
- c. Within Community Separators, guide development and subdivision design to avoid apparent residential density in excess of one parcel per 20 acres; use visually effective setbacks near roadways and other public recreational areas; and observe height, architectural design, lighting, and sign controls.



Templeton - Atascadero community separation



GOAL**4**

VISUAL RESOURCES WILL BE PROTECTED WITHIN VISUAL SENSITIVE RESOURCE AREAS (SRAS) AND FOR SCENIC CORRIDORS ALONG WELL-TRAVELED HIGHWAYS AND ROADS.

Policy VR 4.1 Designation of Scenic Corridors

Designate scenic corridors based on the recommendations for Scenic Corridor Studies, for the candidate roads and highways listed in Table VR-2.

↓ ***Implementation Strategy VR 4.1.1 Scenic Corridor: Work Plan***

Propose a priority list and work program for consideration by the Board of Supervisors to conduct corridor studies and designate the candidate roads and highways listed in Table VR-2. At a minimum, the corridor studies should (a) specify the features that need to be protected through a site-specific analysis of each viewshed; (b) state why it is important to protect those features; (c) where applicable, establish specific mapped boundaries that define the minimum area necessary to protect the identified features; (d) identify the type of inappropriate development that should be regulated; and (e) involve area property owners; and (f) be accompanied by an economic assessment.

↓ ***Implementation Strategy VR 4.1.2 Scenic corridor: Design Standards***

Establish scenic corridor design standards in conjunction with scenic corridor and highway designations. Regulations should be modeled after the Highway Corridor Design Standards in place in the Land Use Element. Guidelines and standards should require sensitive siting of development and visually effective setbacks. In addition, the guidelines and standards should address siting and building design below ridgetops, access roads, landscaping, building height, signs, lighting, and outdoor advertising. Any regulations should ensure that there would not be undue restrictions on private property or agricultural operations. In addition, design standards for projects subject to discretionary review should balance the



TABLE VR-2**CANDIDATE SUGGESTED SCENIC CORRIDORS**

| | |
|--|--|
| Adelaida Road | Highway 101 |
| Avila Beach Drive | Huasna Road from Lopez Drive |
| Chimney Rock Road | Nacimiento Lake Drive/Interlake Road from Paso Robles to Monterey County |
| Cypress Mountain Drive from Santa Rosa Creek Road to Chimney Rock Road | Orcutt Road from the San Luis Obispo City Limits to Lopez Drive |
| Elkhorn Road/Elkhorn Grade Road in the Carrizo Plain | Palo Prieta Cholame Road/Bitterwater Road/Soda Lake Road from Cholame to the California Valley |
| Foothill Road from San Luis Obispo city limits to Los Osos Valley Road | Pecho Valley Road from Rodman Drive through Montana de Oro State Park |
| Hi Mountain Road | Pozo Road between Hi Mountain Road and Highway 58 |
| Highway 41 between Morro Bay and Atascadero | Prefumo Canyon Road/See Canyon Road |
| Highway 46 East | Price Canyon Road |
| Highway 46 West | Santa Rosa Creek Road |
| Highway 58 from the Santa Margarita urban reserve line to the Kern County line | South Bay Boulevard from Santa Ysabel Avenue to Highway 1 |
| Lopez Drive from Huasna Road to Lopez Lake Recreation Area | Highway 227 from Price Canyon Road to Arroyo Grande City Limits |

Policy VR 4.3 Scenic Corridor Roadway Design

The County should develop policies and standards for each designated scenic corridor that will guide all County and State road and highway development projects. An example of such policies and standards is included in **Appendix 6**.

